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## Children & Family Services Division Office of Child Abuse Prevention

### **SPECIAL START TRAINING PROGRAM**

*Trained professionals assist parents with infants leaving Neonatal intensive care unit*

The Special Start Training Program (SSTP) is funded by the California Department of Social Services' (CDSS) Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) using federal Child Abuse Prevention & Treatment Act (CAPTA) funds. One purpose of CAPTA funds is to develop, implement, or operate programs to assist, obtain or coordinate necessary services for families of disabled infants with life-threatening issues. The SSTP trains community professionals who work with parents, biological parents, foster parents, or caregivers in the home environment of the infant after discharge from the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

In California, currently, there are 22 Level 3 regional NICU units, 22 Level 2 NICU units and 72 Community (or Level 1) NICU in **medical facilities across the state?** The grant for this training was awarded to the University of California at San Francisco Medical Center. The medical center has a leading Level 3 regional NICU with a new state-of-the-art neuro-intensive NICU. The SSTP teaches specifics of the developmental needs of the medically fragile infant upon discharge from the NICU. The training not only educates the caregivers about developmental needs, but instructs the parents/caregivers in reading the infants' cues and the appropriate response to these cues. Through the relationship of communication, understanding the child's needs and response, the infants' development is enhanced. This early intervention encourages relationship bonding while facilitating the infants' development with proven positive results.

Premature and low birth weight births have been increasing in California. Prematurity has been found to be a risk factor for child abuse and neglect, and therefore there is a growing need for SSTP training. Because the highest degree of medical technology is required for infants being discharged from NICUs, parents are not always equipped to properly care for them without some kind of specialized training.

Historically, professionals, caregivers and parents receive one-day, on-site trainings typically held throughout the state. In addition, a three-day practicum is offered at the SSTP offices. The on-site trainings have proven effective in providing essential education and training for individuals working with parents and families responsible for caring for infants. In response to the increasing numbers of infants in the NICU units, the SSTP has expanded to include Webcasting. A series of Webcasts are being developed over the next year to increase the number of potential trainees.

A SSTP Web site is currently under development.